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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#) [CH](#) [KN](#) [KS](#)  
SUBJECT: REGIONALISM ALIVE AND KICKING IN SWING PROVINCE OF  
CHUNGCHONG

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Insistence among pundits in Seoul that regionalism is declining falls on deaf ears in the swing provinces of the Chungcheong region. The region is divided into two provinces, North and South Chungcheong, in which Daejeon, with its population of about 1.5 million people, is the largest city. The region's political claim to fame is that no presidential candidate who failed to win in North Chungcheong has been elected president since 1967. In South Chungcheong a recent newspaper poll puts Lee Hoi-chang, who claims that province as his hometown, in a statistical dead-heat with -- and only a couple percentage points behind -- Grand National Party (GNP) candidate Lee Myung-bak. However, North Chungcheong polls show Lee Myung-bak with a commanding 20 percentage point lead and odds are Chungcheong voters will again vote for the winner this year.

¶2. (C) Despite the selection of Daejeon as the relocation site of some of the ROKG's administrative functions, people feel "alienated" by the choice of other cities for large government investment projects. As in the rest of the country, economic issues take top billing in this election, though, when queried, policy toward North Korea and educational reform were also important. In the end, all politics is local and the people of Chungcheong will decide their votes based on perceptions of which candidate is most likely to promote growth for their region. End Summary

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About the Region  
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¶3. (C) On November 20, poloff traveled to Daejeon to meet with politicians and academics in the centrally located "swing state" Chungcheong Province. The region has seen significant growth in the last decade (thanks in part to the KTX train which makes the trip from Seoul in under an hour), but the provinces still remain comparatively rural. South Chungcheong province, in which Daejeon is located, was the home of two capitals of the ancient Baekje kingdom. The province will host part of a capital again, as the government is planning to relocate select administrative functions to a new administrative city northwest of Daejeon. Daejeon considers itself the science and technology hub of Korea, due largely to the presence of one of Korea's premier engineering schools, the Korean Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST).

14. (C) All three camps -- GNP, United New Democratic Party (UNDP), and People's First Party (PFP) -- agreed that regionalism is still alive in Chungcheong. A local reporter told poloff regionalism was still a factor as was nostalgia for the Park Chung-hee (1961-1979) regime. In Daejeon the population is divided almost evenly between people from Korea's other regions who tend to remain politically affiliated with their hometowns. The reporter speculated that most people understand that regionalism should not be a factor in deciding the election, but in reality the choice between the candidates is narrow. Lack of significant differences in candidates' policies may be driving more people back to regionalism.

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Capital Relocation  
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15. (C) In the 2002 election campaign, candidate Roh Moo-hyun pledged to pursue capital relocation -- a policy on which he and rival Lee Hoi-chang differed. Roh kept his word, and the National Assembly passed legislation approving the move on December 29, 2003. The relocation of the capital to the Daejeon area was intended to relieve congestion in Seoul and balance regional development. The plan was later downgraded to move only some administrative functions to Chungcheong, with key government agencies like the Blue House, the National Assembly, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade all staying in Seoul. According to the local UNDP office, when the project was first discussed, the ROKG agreed to contribute KW 12 trillion and the private sector would contribute another KW 26-30 trillion. They are currently within budget at an estimated KW 42 trillion and the offices are scheduled to open in 2012.

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Lee vs. Lee  
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16. (C) Lee Myung-bak still maintains a narrow lead in Chungcheong polls, but his primary problem is his opposition while Seoul mayor to relocating the capital to the region. In a campaign stop there on November 28, Lee Myung-bak reversed his stance saying that he no longer opposes the relocation. Nevertheless, the entry of Lee Hoi-chang, who claims Yeasan in South Chungcheong as his hometown, significantly diminished local support for Lee Myung-bak. Park Geun-hye, popular because of nostalgia for her father's regime and because her mother hails from the region, helped the GNP's regional support ratings by throwing her support behind Lee Myung-bak. Nevertheless, Lee Myung-bak is still vulnerable in Chungcheong.

17. (C) Regional PFP candidate and former South Chungcheong Shim Dae-pyung's support is small and local, largely because his platform consists mainly of promoting the capital relocation project. A Shim adviser told poloff that Shim would wait for the results of the BBK investigation before deciding which candidate to support. However, after initially indicating he would join the GNP, on December 3 Shim announced his support for independent candidate Lee Hoi-chang. Shim said GNP arrogance had changed his mind, while the GNP said Shim made unreasonable demands regarding the divvying up of nominations for the April 2008 National Assembly elections.

18. (C) Meanwhile, the UNDP sees opportunity in the split conservative vote. The fact that the number of undecided voters has increased significantly, they maintain, makes it possible for Chung Dong-young to move from third place to second place. The UNDP plans to emphasize Lee Myung-bak's early opposition to the capital relocation in order to attract more swing voters. Chung Dong-young's camp also told poloff that Chung's values have not been highlighted enough -- his belief in democracy and peace and resolution of social bipolarization gives Chung an edge. They will also launch a negative campaign against the two Lees, targeting Lee Hoi-chang for claiming to be from the region, but he is

actually from North Korea -- only his father's grave is in Chungcheong.

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Comment  
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19. (C) Chungcheong has always prided itself as having the "casting vote" in presidential elections. This is not just a boast, because Chungcheong can vote with either the southwest (Jeolla) or the Southeast (Gyeongsang) voters. The possession of the casting vote has also given local political bosses considerable leverage, as displayed by Kim Jong-pil for several decades. Kim was influential in electing both Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung. Chungcheong votes also made the difference in electing Roh Moo-hyun. This time around there is no political figure comparable to Kim Jong-pil. The best Chungcheong can do is Shim Dae-pyung, whose polls are so low that national newspapers no longer report them. Shim's support for Lee Hoi-chang will probably make only a small difference, which most probably means that Chungcheong will go with a winner again -- Lee Myung-bak.

VERSHBOW